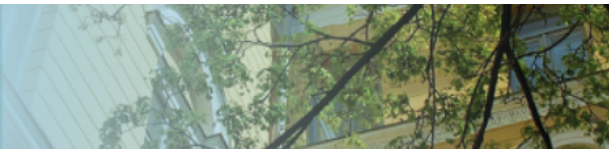


Language and the Scientific Imagination
The 11th International Conference of ISSEI
Language Centre, University of Helsinki (Finland)
28 July – 2 August 2008



The Tragic Between Identity and Otherness

In his *Life of Solon* Plutarch says that at one point in a discussion with Phrynichos, Solon became very angry about the falsehoods the playwrights of the time, including Phrynichos himself, were presenting on the stage. Phrynichos reassured him by saying that all these things are not falsehoods but a game. This game, which ancient Greece invented, is one of the most important games of the intellect and is defined by Democracy.

Theatre cannot exist without Democracy i.e. without otherness. Democracy is the acceptance of differences and the Athenian world which lived democratically had discovered thesis and antithesis, statement and reply, sameness and otherness.

For this reason, when examining this magnificent game, we find that man is studied, as Oedipus described him in *Oedipus Tyrannous* by Sophocles, when he solved the riddle of the Sphinx and the monster exploded and fell silent. This man, if I may so, whom the play presents, is not the accomplished man of Menander – man is an accomplished thing when he is a man – but is a man – monster. He is that man who has four, two and three legs. His is brother and father, son and husband. That is to say there is a blending of the years within him and for this reason also the odious crime which he carries, without his knowledge, within him, hubris. And I wonder if hubris is not this very existence of man, in relation to what the gods want. It is with these questions the globalised world should

interpret itself, because we are experiencing monstrous situations, which emanate from us.

Certainly, “The ruling does not like changes”, as Xenophon says. The established order wants to keep its vested rights and wants to increase them. It is despotism, it is the profit of capitalism, it is all the phenomena of totalitarianism which we have seen, large and small, in the present day Armageddon.

Tiresias at one moment in the outstanding play that *Oedipus Tyrannous* is - the model as Aristotle has it and which expresses each of us – says to Oedipus “Today you will be born and you will die.” Each performance in the theatre is a birth and a death. And each of us carries this everlasting death, as Marlowe’s Faust says, “Oh, I am dying an everlasting death!”

In this death is concealed the whole mystery of man and the whole mystery of life. And the theatre shows death on the stage because it is an ephemeral matter, a representation and a true lie, as Picasso would say, in speaking of his art. And he repeats the anger of Solon and the answer of Phrynichos that art is a game.

In this relationship of sameness and otherness, which is my theme, is the relationship of finding who I am and knowing myself and my fellow human-being. Self-knowledge leads inevitably to knowledge of the other, and knowledge of the other, the misfortunes of the other can become your misfortunes too. The relationship of stage and audience, the

magic, with the compassion of “suffering too” of the ancients, brings catharsis of the suffering of the hero and this is both a cure and self-knowledge.

I do not belong to the school of aestheticism, I do not accept aestheticism. It is simply a result and the old commentators made, I believe, a great mistake in their interpretation because they were influenced by German idealism. The researches of the science of religion and anthropology helped to a great extent in the domain of the theatre and the research of Vernant, Vital-Naquet and Detienne in France showed that man has roots that are religious and anthropological and to become the holy sacrificial animal, which is the outcome of the hero on the stage, he must be trapped in the hubris of life and be sacrificed, to be crushed because he does not have the power of memory.

When Christ is in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and his sweat is like drops of blood, the others are asleep! They sleep in cosmic somnolence; they are in cosmic sleep, while some others have the memory, the recollection as Plato would say, of Truth. These are the playwrights, the poets, men, that is, who can see through the closed wall of life and receive those messages that come from elsewhere. They are the men who have the Pythia within them, she who conceives of the inconceivable.

They are enlightened albeit temporarily and they find the crack, the chink in the wall to tell their fellow men, through the discourse of the theatre, what is going on in the world, what is happening to each of us and what is happening, in short, within the destiny of the

human race, which is led from birth to death in a continuous death, as Marlowe says. And Goethe will say it in another way in Faust: “Beautiful moment, pause”.

This beautiful moment which we ask to pause conceals within it the whole human drama. The beautiful moment cannot stand still. Man, trapped and shipwrecked in time, according to Jaspers, is trapped in order to become a sacrificial victim.

What does sacrificial victim mean in the language of the ancients?

The sacrificial victim was a kind of scapegoat. He was that young man of Athens at the festival of the Thargelia, which was a festival of purification, on whom the Athenians laid their sins, their transgressions and their wrongdoing and then set him loose to flee into the fields to die burdened with their evil deeds. And Oedipus is a scapegoat for Thebes. As you know, the ancient Greeks had two basic themes which occupied them and were ontological for them: to have a polis, that is a space to which they belonged, and to have sight. Hence Theatre, from *Theomai*, I see.

When Oedipus finds out that he is a monster he cannot bear to see his sins. His deeds come and find him. He does not act knowingly. His deeds come upon him and find him and he leaves his space, the familiar space of Thebes. He is rejected, that is, as a man without a polis, which is the greatest curse and the greatest condemnation for a man, while at the same time the polis is also cleansed, as he himself is also cleansed, as one who suffers, through the tragedy.

In the theatre act, which is a second act, we experience the sacrifice. We speak about the priest of Dionysus who presides over those three thrilling days of ancient Athens. He presides next to the Thymele (altar) over the acts of Dionysus. They are the three days of the 11th – 13th of the month of Elaphibolion (March). It recalls the 14th of Nisan, which is the day of our Lord's crucifixion. You see some things are not fortuitous in my view. There exist the archetypes, as Jung would say. These archetypes function among other peoples as well and on other occasions.

The victim is sacrificed to cleanse the city in the month of the Thargelia. It is not by chance that Socrates – another victim – is sacrificed, drinks the hemlock on the 6th day of the month of Thargelion (mid June). He is a kind of scapegoat so that the city of Athens, the Democracy, should be cleansed of the sin it committed against the wisest man of all time, as the Delphic oracle called him.

You see, for someone to find his identity he must have the strength not to be shocked. And when we say identity, we do not mean folklorism! This is a failed identity and, unfortunately, in Cyprus in the last years, we speak of identity and we mean folklorism: Kokkinochoria, folk poets etc. These things have a comparative value; they are not our identity.

The identity of Cypriot Hellenism is Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Heracleitus, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno of Citium, Byzantium, the Fathers, the folksong. It is

Dionysios Solomos, it is all the great things that the Greek race gave birth to. It is not the vrakha (breeches) and the various dances. All these have a value but are not far reaching.

So, when we find our identity and exist, and this the true, great writer achieves, who can rescue the rest as well from the state of inertia which the powers who are trying to control the world, called by the Apostle Paul “the rulers of the darkness of this age”, are trying to reduce us to. For this reason a terrible strength and will is needed for man to be able to stand on his feet and answer as De Gaulle answered when they asked him who he considered to be the greatest political figure of all time. Everyone expected him to say Alexander or Caesar. He told them “Antigone”! That is to say, the person who said NO.

There are two levels of life: the external level, of social reality, politics, the economy, but there is also the other one, the level of the eternal, the divine.

The second level is the dream of each one of us, the perfect self, important and perfect deeds, functioning within us. We see them and tremble or rejoice. It is the ecstasy of the Sublime of Longinus.

The role of the Theatre, of Art, is not to persuade us about anything. It is not discourse, which has the aim of leading us to a dialectical discussion or dialogue with ourselves or with the people who are acting on the stage. The sublime illumines the human mind, the human heart, for the purpose of leading to ecstasy, i.e. to take us a little out of ourselves, to see ourselves.

A few days ago I had a dream – if you will permit me to tell it – that I was performing with Maria Callas, and I told her (she was playing *Medea*) that the solution to problems of stalemate comes either through anger or through ecstasy. When you have a stalemate you must act either in anger or in ecstasy. But to be able to accept this situation the other must exist. The other is your other self, the one Rimbaud said (*Je est un autre*). The permanent other, the completely Other as the Fathers said, is God.

We say identity. Identity is not a static state but a dynamic one, existing in relationships. This universe is relationships and the Theatre presents relationships and combinations on the stage; consequently, when we talk about identity, we are talking about a dynamic state which is multifarious, multilevel, never in a horizontal and never in a vertical form.

Dr. Klitos Ioannides

10 Ellados, Flat 401,

2003

Akropolis

Nicosia

Cyprus